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THE YALE SERIES OF YOUNGER POETS

46

EDITED BY W. H. AUDEN

· *A BEGINNING*

BY

ROBERT HORAN



# A Beginning

BY

Robert Horan

*With a Foreword by*

W. H. Auden

NEW HAVEN

• Yale University Press

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View for "Second-Geography."

Experimental Review for "The Loaves, the Fishes."

*For* SAMUEL BARBER  
*and* GIAN CARLO MENOTTI





## Foreword

TO write poetry a man must be endowed with two quite distinct gifts, a love of language and a private vision of the public world. The love of language makes him a versifier and comes, therefore, at least logically, first since, while all verse is not poetry, all poetry is verse and immediately recognizable as such even if it is as "free" as it is in Rimbaud's *Un Saison en Enfer* or St.-J. Perse's *Anabase*.

The diction, for example, of a poet whose love of language is deficient is either too conventional—the noun dictates its own adjective, the rhyme distorts the sense—or too self-consciously strange—when a common adjective or rhyme is really needed he dare not believe it: similarly, his rhythmical patterns are either too mechanically strict or the variations so wildly arbitrary that any sense of an underlying pattern is lost.

Mr. Horan passes both these tests of a good versifier. In "Soft Swimmer, Winter Swan," for example,

Sped by the building cold and rare in ether, birds hasten  
the heart already taxed with cloud and cherubim—  
fretted heaven, strained songless and flown dim.

he shows that he knows when to use a plain word and when to use a baroque one. In "Litany" the meter varies all the way from

• Among the skeletons of sun  
where the yellow lions run

goes one in a diamond color,  
tears on his antique shoulder.

to

Even as I  
to his lion's side will fly,  
or with feathery fastness  
to his feast,

and yet the poem preserves a rhythmical unity.

In the end, of course, it is not the poet's technique but his vision which decides the value of his work. A man either loves language or he doesn't, yet, if he have but a seed of this love in his heart, by reading and hard work, he can make it flower into a true passion. His vision of life, on the other hand, cannot be developed in this way; it is probably given him in the beginning once and for all, and his life task is to explore it further and express it more completely. Here reading and conscious study are little help; indeed they may become a hindrance tempting him away from what he actually sees to what they suggest to him that he ought to see. It is always difficult for any poet to be indifferent to fashion (to be ashamed of being fashionable is as bad as being proud of it) and to remember that, to adapt a remark of Rossini's, all kinds of poetry are good except the boring kind. In some periods it has been the poet with the eccentric vision who found it hardest to dare to be himself; in ours it is more often the other way around—the poet whose gift is, say, for straightforward lyric statement of immediate feeling is frightened into trying to be metaphysical or apocalyptic.

Mr. Horan is fortunate in that not only has he been granted an exciting and unique vision of the world, but also, as is evidenced by "Second Geography," a poem written in

his teens, discovered early the kind of poetic treatment for which it called.

. . . Horses move  
their separate maps, pause in the hands of rocks.  
This is an exile from crystal and sand :  
to walk in the simple wood, through days  
of leather and cobbled rain. To stand  
at gates, outside Arabia, their ears beating,  
hooves in the copper hills of histories.

What excites Mr. Horan here, as in many of his best poems, "The Sun," "The Lesser Kingdom," "Clean, Cool, Early," is the contrast between the natural time in which the creatures live, their "arctic, miniature, unwrinkled world," and the historical time which, for better or, more usually, for worse, man creates by his acts of living.

In Italian painting or in Renaissance poetry like Góngora's *Las Soledades*, nature is a setting for the godly or the civilized life. Hills, waters, woods, birds, and beasts are redeemed and made beautiful and friendly by the Madonna or the Venus whose love has gathered them about her. In Wordsworth nature is more independent but still directly related as the teacher, now comforting, now alarming, now obscure, from whom, if one is only attentive and sensitive enough, one can learn how human life should be lived. In Mr. Horan's poems, on the other hand, as in most poetry of our time, nature is the other-than-man, other even than the child.

These are sand wastes or wet worlds, foreign and far,  
the least inch of Africa reappearing everywhere,  
in the rock garden, in the lilac bushes.  
They share, like loftier kingdoms,  
zones of danger, sleep and hunger and desire.

But have they gallows, mock trials, and murder?  
Have they pistols, kings, and papers?  
Have they cages, chains?

"History," said Stephen Daedalus, "is the nightmare from which I would awake," but this is not possible, indeed it is precisely this attempt to escape being a historical creature that makes man's history a nightmare. To try to live the natural, unhistorical life is to be "fooled in sleep" and perish, while

waking brings back, not where we were,  
but where we are.

In a very beautiful poem, "The Little City," Mr. Horan observes the world of the spider.

By evening the web is heavy with monsters,  
bright constellation of wasps and bees,  
breathless, surrendered.  
Bronze skeletons dangle on the wires  
and a thin wing flutters.  
The medieval city hangs in its stars.

Spider lumbers down the web  
and the city stretches with the weight of his walking.  
By night we cannot see the flies' faces  
and the spider, rocking.

Were the city of man what we should have made it, it would possess the innocence and grace of the spider's city; as it is, the resemblances are accusations. Nature has indeed much to teach us, but chiefly by her refusal to be a support, by the cold shoulder she turns on every motion on our part of idolatry or nostalgia.

W. H. AUDEN

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## Twenty-one Years

**C**AME with wind and warning this morning  
the first birds. Came sun polishing  
the crucifix-insect where he paused  
dew-instant. I beheld here and there  
spiders going in grass to a thread cathedral,  
and a round serpent holding both our breaths;  
saw, on the twigs, the calligraphy of snails,  
and ants marching on the flower-wheels.  
Chariots carried all of the living down today.

Who will know later that the light was particular,  
betraying by one or many signs a place,  
a time arrived at in dandelion summer  
that I might stop to look at the underside  
of my memories, and slip from each hand  
the stitched veil of a year?

Failure follows a ship on a voyage of Sundays,  
but leaving a sea-greened cross to catch or drift to.  
(Shirts make flags; visitors pass and will rescue.)  
Listed in the boat, we turn toward lost, resighted  
and prodigal island, mirage of our miracles.  
But today will whirl especial in the water, will push  
to a pilgrimage. The sight of a continent breaking  
over the boat fountains me forward from purgatory.

On the channel the sea returns the faces  
of friends in a grey mirror, their names  
in the leaves of a book, washed beneath me  
on the whitening wave, their flesh flashed  
through this wilderness to make my cargo.



Today, the middle of a morning, I run after  
any sight or sorrow, loud to discover sun  
in the weather of shadow. Narrower now  
by a year, called farther away and fixed faster  
to a sail, leaving father and a last look  
toward the back-swelling children's horizon.  
But dearer than these, I go in a bird's direction  
to a holiday country, priest of a water and a world.  
Over the blue edge of the map with the flying fish,  
that last year may not find my future face,  
my hunting or haunted image frozen toward west.

# The End of Delight

**SOME** saffron summer, crossed with a silk sunshine,  
leaf-shot in light, lining my black feet  
with rims of glitter, brimming the grey grain  
and drowning the dry and diamond-headed wheat  
in a gather and daze of shoulder-warming heat,

has some such summer come? sealing the blossom,  
filling the cradles of water with weighty fish,  
swelling the yellowing stars, flushing the fountain  
in drops and garlands, fastening the flesh  
that blood can no longer leap toward the red mountain?

Hung on the edge of a wave the fruit trembles,  
slides like a tear on the window of the air,  
falls in a whisper like a breaking bubble;  
threads snap; birds blink; the dust on the stair  
lifts like a page and settles everywhere.

This sudden summer sprung from all the trees,  
from wells, from rocks, riant, rushed, complete,  
strikes silent at the peak. I, on my knees,  
will strain through surprise to remember, to repeat  
the shift, the shock, the death in every street.

I, in my graves, in safe and secret sleep,  
wrapped in the dolphined seas, alone in ships  
that slide through the wash of days, that sometime slip,  
weak in the wood, dissolving all their shapes  
in windy worlds and watery mishaps,

will recall the grass kingdom and the scattered dew  
strung with the bell and bubble of midnight;  
that earlier arc of summer, fabled by few  
birds swinging on the grey branch of the light;  
the death of a dim star; the end of delight.

Will remember the floating world thundering still,  
poised on the brink of breath, shudder and fade;  
and the luminous chalk-and-cricket-covered hill  
explode, like the parchment heart, burst in its bed  
of layered blood and story-dazzled dead.

## Beethoven's Heiligenstadt

**W**HERE is the moment sewn unseparate,  
whole sight and sound delivered down  
to one listener, looking and looked upon?  
He sleeps in his windmill-castle,  
sleeps while the wooden arms unwind  
their archaic clock in the counting wind.  
The listener now lies drowned  
in faint and soundless weather  
and quiet ground.

Rising, he looks from the wide window  
through May-amazing morning, pale meadows  
where sheep rise chilled from sleep  
and stumble through dewy shadows.  
He looks far out and strains to catch  
all that was lost:  
the sound that once fell forward on the ear  
in fresh festivals of fire;  
the wheat in a windstorm; wooden wheels  
and rivers banked with birds.  
A music to shake light and shout out,  
all trumpeted together on cool air,  
from the thrush to the thunder, clarion clear!

Now this is done in him, sunk like a choir of bells  
in miles of water; he lies like some lion lost,  
failing even the roar of anger or the peal of praise.  
He walks in the hushed streets, in the grey Eden  
where children chain, their heels ringing stones.  
They stop in the doorway as he passes,

pause as at a funeral procession,  
following with white eyes this mild monster  
wrapped in the wide cloak, refusing pity.  
What ruin does he find in the wavering city;  
what memory wreathes him in the rippled rivers,  
and wasted song?

The parchment that lies at his hand holds  
in pitiful prison all bells, May mornings,  
waterfalls and wells; the lion-legion,  
the leaves and the lightning.  
Here he has rushed down all he could remember,  
salted with sorrow, bound in the knots of ink,  
pastoral as angels before the silence struck.

Doomed to one house and head, one heaven  
and one star's station, did this silence  
silence him, deaf but not dead  
to the crumbling constellation?  
Or did, instead, the crippled crown,  
rough in resurrection, sing where swallows  
could not follow, and raising its ruined head,  
rush all memory back past recollection?

# Litany

**A**MONG the skeletons of sun  
where the yellow lions run  
goes one in a diamond color,  
tears on his antique shoulder.

He walks in a sea of salt  
with intention to exalt;  
to scatter the green miles  
with blessings of exile.

Even as I  
to his lion's side will fly,  
or with feathery fastness  
to his feast,

as birds surround  
a glistening wound;  
my body endangering  
the moment of his angeling.

The most amiable and best beloved host.  
Of these he is my God longest,  
and shall be least lost  
and last blessed.

# Little City

**SPIDER**, from his flaming sleep,  
staggers out into the window frame;  
swings out from the red den where he slept  
to nest in the gnarled glass.  
Fat hero, burnished cannibal  
lets down a frail ladder and ties a knot,  
sways down to a landing with furry grace.

By noon this corner is a bullet-colored city  
and the exhausted architect  
sleeps in his pale wheel,  
waits without pity for a gold visitor  
or coppery captive, his aerial enemies  
spinning headlong down the window to the trap. .

The street of string shakes now and announces  
a surprised angel in the tunnel of thread.  
Spider dances down his wiry heaven to taste the moth.  
A little battle begins and the prison trembles.  
The round spider hunches like a judge.  
The wheel glistens.  
But this transparent town that caves in at a breath  
is paved with perfect steel.  
The victim hangs by his feet, and the spider  
circles invisible avenues, weaving a grave.

By evening the web is heavy with monsters,  
bright constellation of wasps and bees,  
breathless, surrendered.  
Bronze skeletons dangle on the wires

and a thin wing flutters.  
The medieval city hangs in its stars.

Spider lumbers down the web  
and the city stretches with the weight of his walking.  
By night we cannot see the flies' faces  
and the spider, rocking.



# The Sun

For James Agee

**H**E lays around us his wealth of arms, a soldier of bloom.  
In blond armor he raises the roses and worms.  
We walk unmasked in his love, a broom-colored world,  
grey strangers under his pitiless dominion,  
spending his million palms. His bold shower  
dizzies the beggar, dances the head of the lover.  
We rest as the tulip works, and are weak with night,  
with the light elastic rain clocking the window;  
its blue highways cross our dreams like tears.  
But then we arise, sun's subtle song beneath our doors,  
his fresh found fire lighting up our lids.  
He dots with sparks the milk in the raw kitchen,  
flames like a lit spider in the knot of glass;  
whereupon we look out, handless, heartless with hope  
upon the day. He sings in all our puzzled throats.

Our morning walk is dappled, and the garden swings  
through its layers of gloom slowly into light.  
The shoes are splashed with shine and the wrist with dew.  
A mute celebration is at the foot; iris, violet,  
the mouse-bitten bulb and bannered branch  
all attest their strength, his grace, my life.  
Surely these shafts of emerald, these cups and sticks  
pushed from the rustling dark, defeat our prayers.  
Their aimless wealth makes poverty of pride;  
their splendor a blind effort at surrender,  
(as those who love should love, but will withhold;)  
cathedrals where no worship is, but light, light!

(Sun, spartan but not sparing on the dazed Arab  
reeling to his tent your merciless meadow of diamond.)

Here in my lean garden, in your radiant room,  
looking for nothing, I could somewhat see;  
draw the drenched day in, pocket the lavish air  
and all your arrows. A gift from letterless latitudes,  
soft blow on blow, upon the mute, straining blossom.  
I held it in every flag, fold, buttered and nodding flower,  
your careless abundance lacing this porcelain harbor.

The ant attacking the iris, the wasp patiently  
looping his zones of light, all nature's timid  
and battling loves are here alive; they pillage  
the knotted grass, swarm the pink air, shine, sing,  
stalk in their star-cricket night or lashing noon  
all under your marvelous and weighty hand.  
Even the spider leans from his cradle of rocks:  
you stand like a cracked jewel in his daring eye.

Again, sun, and again, unraveling endless flesh  
and breath toward our dim stone. Wheresoever this house  
and garden with its mount of birds, its swept, locked  
and windowless sorrows, shall turn, your wheel dazzles  
with charity; your kind, meaningless, rioting heaven  
crowns each shaking fool seeking his shade.

# The Drowned Wife

WITH weed and with sea-barley crowned,  
the swinging wife, indifferent, drowned,  
floats through the bubbles, ticked with time,  
washed in a hurricane of lime,  
unanimous in doom.

The rescuers bear with them blood,  
the starving bring their painted food,  
and met at the bank without a sound,  
weak with the hour, scuff the ground,  
too late for any good.

Husband, stand on the bridge and wait  
for your wife to flow under, swollen white,  
her drinking face in the losing dark  
warped in the wave, wrapped in the rock,  
singing beyond sight.

Sewn in the sea, she has fallen far,  
wide of our flowers and our war,  
troubled with tongues of light.  
The water will burn in her bones all night  
and loosen her foolish hair.

O leave the deserted banks at last,  
wrapped like a hunchback in the mist,  
your treasure is wrinkled away;  
your bride lies pale and wild in the sea,  
and the keys of the sea are dust.

## The Loaves, the Fishes

**F**LOCK, flock up and through our eyes  
the double birds. The sun stripes and troubles  
water, but stars will turn back shine again;  
in night, the sight of cripple and lack  
will be replaced with areas of black.

We divide the single flesh of loaves.  
(The loves, the repetitions; ripples  
and divisions of waxed light; the chaining  
shadows; again, green miles of rain.)  
Our hearts forever toss their wells of blood.

The fish, burned dark in the sun,  
drawn from the tall marbles of water,  
filling the baskets, rich with salt.  
There shall be more. Like cups of water  
loosened from a sea, frost broken out of glaciers,  
lizards cut from dragons. The wound is sealed  
with salt. The thin seeds remain. Apples explode.  
Harvest.

But wind never will move that stone through noon.  
Alone, our feet stained memory too soon  
with the walk of leaves.  
There may be these, but never again be this.

## Though the Eye Be Adamant

**T**HE blind look down in ebony, interior humility;  
(the deaf decipher sacraments at lips).  
They stiffen when the swaying ground displaces their agility  
and flutters the compass in their finger tips.

What muffled melody falls on the misted mirror,  
distinguished as water from water or thread from thread;  
mysterious as the whippoorwill-ghost, but coming nearer,  
shaking the lace ladder of nerves with a foreign tread?

The head waits in its arc of air, the grey breath is suspended  
anticipating the riot of revelation;  
the face in the posture of grace is tight and attentive  
like innocent animals arched in expectation.

The blood, then, fenced in flesh, will leap through its labyrinth,  
rush through its crystal reefs and gates to a terminal.  
These private signals shout, though the eye be adamant;  
the pulse, the taste, the touch surprise the external.

Noise drenches them, dazes them, floods them with a fine fire.  
As stripes announce a tiger, so the whispering floor  
declares a visitor; these secrets, coiled in the ear,  
describe the intruder, the hand at the lock on the door.

(To the deaf, the silence which surrounds disaster,  
seeing the dish crumble or the lightning strike,  
is peaceful as constant thunder, mute as alabaster.  
In the morning, all birds and bells will ring alike.)

Moored by faint cables to the intricate dome of shadow,  
waking far under water in a leafless room,  
the blind walk out in the painted park, or stand in the  
    meadow,  
followed by curious deer in the delicate gloom.

Memory fails to embroider their kingdom with flowers,  
their oceans with islands, their dusk with a lilac light.  
Somewhere the steeple strikes strange and immaculate hours.  
When the deer tremble, when the park closes, it will be night.

# January

**T**HE shelled flesh will not hold  
nor the locked mind heal  
its wind of wounds;

only the stone castle of bone  
to signal where the blood has flown,  
(as winds feel out the skeleton of hounds).

Here in the laced and leaning land  
shines, in a ball of ice, his star-leaved hand,  
(his body, the death-eaten island).

Beneath the linens of blood and winter  
what steel shocks the shell of the water?  
(His shoulders lodged in the young hills of the snow.)

The ants sing in the swollen meadow,  
the core of the hill is locked in the marrow.  
The printed butterflies blow.

In this violet-veined land,  
who, taking his hand in his hand,  
calling across the woven fields of summer,

hears the dead echo his find;  
the birds turn, and, planted in the wind,  
stare at the newcomer?

## Agenbite of Inwit

I AM moved here so to surround myself  
I shall wall in all dragons and desires;  
shall suffer their hunger home within myself,  
carry the heavy heart where swing their fires  
flushing the face of fright, tearing the tree  
that blooms in the road that disappears in me.  
Then I shall have them caught in the occasion  
engineered by breath; a clear constellation  
masked by the horizon of the flesh,  
swarming the hive, mangered and leashed.  
When staked in me, they wheel like failing stars,  
fill the blood with abundance and ache air;  
drive me to decipher the intricate mile  
of habitation that they have, and will awhile.  
They blaze, they thirst. Loaded with the light  
they lean in me; drinking, drain me white.  
Battered awake, I take the interior traitor  
who nailed me, the archangel and ringleader;  
he with his Lucifer splendor strung at my feet  
foams forward; who walked in my wrinkled streets  
or hung in the window of my side as still as sleep,  
runs wide now to embrace me, and I strike,  
stifle, and strain at him, finding his face of rock  
a murdering mirror, the father of my disgrace.  
Remorse rang down to ruin all I own,  
clotted the heart, rotted the rose with the worm.  
Eager for anger, he sits in the skull's quarry  
armed with a spade to dig back all I bury;  
turns coffins over and shakes forth the shame  
I felled without a funeral or a name.



He kisses close ; he wears on his reaching hand  
five instruments to search the itching wound ;  
insatiate, asks for alms ; in the confessional, throned  
in echoes, he drives me to look down, look deeper down,  
driven to see him, see myself in him, the zero-zone.  
I press now to catch this Judas on my tongue ;  
betraying myself, to win his chiming town ;  
by uttering him, break his birth ; facing his face  
to clothe his damaging whisper with an inviolate voice.  
In his rage I release him, knowing I shall be safe  
when the prison he provokes with a flaming touch  
shakes down upon this Samson its thundering roof.

## Second Geography

**T**HE horses rub their wrists on rope  
and leap through a green, wooden prison.  
Surround these soft engines with images of salt  
and they slowly untangle; on stems and tendons  
they run toward you, loose and plural bronze.  
They are ordained with slotted blood from  
silk countries, their heads moving through  
sun-wheels, areas strict with flies.  
(Chariots, wires and turbans.) Horses move  
their separate maps, pause in the hands of rocks.  
This is an exile from crystal and sand :  
to walk in the simple wood, through days  
of leather and cobbled rain. To stand  
at gates, outside Arabia, their ears beating,  
hooves in the copper hills of histories.

# The Lesser Kingdom

OUTSIDE is an aerial kingdom, a galaxy of amethyst, and bumblebees in haze, with wings like windows of cellophane stretched on wires. All hover and pause in a delirium of noise and emerald eyes.

The frogs that shine in fern shall knock in water; their throats make round mountains, and they ride on bubbles, the heart of the voyage transparent.

Freckled and serious, they squat on stones; they snap at flies and smile.

Has this gold wilderness gates and fences?

Crowns and laws and Lucifers?

Have these leaves poverty and palaces?

Is there dominion here? Exile?

As in larger kingdoms, there are prisoners, traps and webs, spiders scuttling, and luminous criminals for food.

Has this danger-infested ground pride in its habitation? ease or agony or something like despair?

The moths are lost in the strawberries, yes, or gnats in the blue towers of iris;

there are caterpillars hung on thorns.

But do they feel dark secure, or terror unalterable?

Do they surmise sunset and the fading light as relief or as an omen?

The threads of antennae explore clover provinces, but these see outside only; their hearts are of fur.

The wasp, like the lion,  
sleeps with all daggers ready, and lightly on a leaf,  
restless at the dim sound of an enemy.  
Are they signaled from safety and betrayed,  
swallowed by swaying snakes on a warm rock,  
poisoned, deceived, dismantled?

Hidden in the blossoming banks on satin haunches,  
the panther lifts a paw.  
The frogs blink their eyes over the rim of the water,  
the pheasants glitter.  
At the moment of battle, cockatoos scream;  
the branches cloud with pink birds.  
Death, there, brings back relaxation  
like the loose, wild rain following days of thunder.  
The beetles in blue armor and the red ant armies  
devour, spear, or sting the unfamiliar.  
Many are ruffled in fright or frozen in anticipation.

These are sand wastes or wet worlds, foreign and far,  
the least inch of Africa reappearing everywhere,  
in the rock garden, in the lilac bushes.  
They share, like loftier kingdoms,  
zones of danger, sleep and hunger and desire.

But have they gallows, mock trials, and murder?  
Have they pistols, kings, and papers?  
Have they cages, chains?

# Breakage

**T**HE sea recovers its lostness,  
breaks its bright windows of light,  
but will fill again; stack shelves on shells,  
the sound of shudder, the shadow, the shine.

What breaks with the hands does not contain surprise.  
The eyes do not stare back, but expect the cone  
of honey to split its gold shutter,  
be mute, be summer frozen small.

I say all bubbles dissolve; birds become sound  
and listen on the rim of barrels for the note  
starring the rain water.

But the bells are hard. They bring a black  
brilliance over any wall. Their rings spread  
and stop coppered bees on the edge of blossom,  
run dark through the thickness of trees.

From the shake around a steeple,  
I would say bells do not shine, but break.

## Palms and Calendars

FOLDED, my tents and stars,  
to the double of day returning;  
confirmed in the light of wars  
and the witness of burning.  
Christened and wrapped in straw,  
his tiger of scripture  
is ribboned with love of law.  
No angel will endanger  
his wings of sulphur, but unlock  
and deliver the breath up to the rock.

So cage the striped and lidded birds, so chain  
entrance and April to a wall of rain.  
The year's palms and calendars  
ring in the heels of the bells.

Such eyes and endeavors  
will fail, like apples in their wells  
of green and bark; hold them to glass,  
whose bones are dark as water was.  
Nothing but cloths of clouds will ever trap  
this salt and silken martyr in our rooms.  
With hands as dry as keys, we guide the map  
and the river, floating toward towns of tombs.

# On the Pink and Pigeoned Beach

ON the pink and pigeoned beach  
fails the amaranthine sea.  
The balconies of memory  
are washed away like lace.

Underneath the water's stations,  
hung like toys in fluid worlds  
sea horses gallop through the pearls,  
starfish climb their crooked nations.

From the margin where we stand  
all our anger is undone;  
courts of water ravel on,  
parks of emerald paved with wind;

carillon of bubbles holding  
fists of weed; and water spiders  
crawling up their tinsel ladders  
spin the brilliant scaffolding.

Now the limitless and loud  
Atlantic falters at our heels,  
gathers its surrendered miles  
like magnets drawing back the dead;

folds its prodigals again,  
noon over noon; lost like needles,  
pulled back to their shining stables  
bearing torn fruit and flowers in.

Here all our dangers seem a sum  
less than love and less than these.  
From their marble farms the fish  
gambol on to greener homes.



# Prometheus

*"God help thee, old man, thy thoughts have created a creature in thee, and he whose intense thinking thus makes him a Prometheus, a vulture feeds upon that heart forever, that vulture the very creature he creates."*

Melville, MOBY DICK

HE pales at pleasure,  
dives in his drenched rack  
toward the dark;  
lies in his ropes and weeps  
but wrenched past care  
for the hummingbird in passage  
through blue air,  
past joy in the sparrowed air.  
Suns and the planet pearls  
sit silent near him, poise  
white in their vacant worlds  
and strike his chains.  
Weak on his rock he smiles  
at their fresh fires, free lights  
that flesh the morning mules;  
feels his body sealed,  
the coffin open and the rubbed bone  
assailable. A tempest of blood  
blinds the rash prisoner in stone,  
wet in his midnight flood.

He prays some wilderness of water  
to wash over these;  
some sea and undulant savior  
restore these agonies

out of the random flesh  
into the spirit; make Spartan  
this small splendor, and wash  
clear the clotted curtain.

The church of chains has breath,  
breathes with his breath,  
moves at his neck and wrist  
delaying death.

He feels for the key, wreathed  
as he is in slow lead,  
bruised by serpents, clothed  
in a blaze, diseased.

His hands knock against final bone;  
and the molten bird, bright on his billowing stone,  
picks at the locks, now strikes  
where the heart storms most,  
drives with the dagger beak through the lost  
islands of his face.

Prometheus, granted this grace,  
mistakes devil for deliverer, who sings  
brilliant in his embrace,  
unknotting the metal strings.  
He will not see, when once he is released,  
the dark blood shine in the eye of the beast.

## Clean, Cool, Early

CLEAN, cool, early,  
the stones arched high and hard;  
cool, calm, awake  
in a light of limes.

Before the leaves melt  
and the fine flow alters  
the wine-flushed window,  
we're held apart in dawn,  
rinsed clear.

The stars are rigged for morning,  
spare and even,  
like the color of water hardened.  
Firm, unspotted, and washed  
free of its random flesh,  
part-frozen, an apple of air.

As with the iceberg-center,  
detail is ornament in this weather;  
fixed in the flowering ice,  
bird, stick, star in ether,  
all taste of emptiness, salted  
and bottled in cobalt together.

To be late is to miss it,  
while the enemy of clarity  
makes rapid revision,  
reels all in an abundance of light  
and drops of false radiance.  
It is that light withheld,  
moved forward inches in a wind,

interior, that shapes a morning.  
Like porcelain or casual sculpture  
in ice, this is scorched  
by indiscriminate sun,  
unlaced in noon.

Seven is an exact moment,  
the transit from station to station  
when energy has been pulled pale,  
but stretched, does not waver,  
but full, does not tilt nor falter.  
It awakens the smallest animals first.

See yourself here the imperfect stranger  
early risen and boated out in blue  
mirror upon mirror back to the beginning;  
an unfamiliar bird and tall intruder.  
Before the leaf loosens,  
and between two forms of light,  
take time to raise from the frosted dust  
and silk-scattered hedges,  
the frame of a rose, the ashes of a room,  
a fern, a small fire in dew, a paused spider.  
These, though moribund in stronger light and years,  
may steady memory, serve to identify  
an arctic, miniature, unwrinkled world.

# O! Mother of My Tears!

## Believe for Me! Fold Thy Son!

*Finnegans Wake*

OUR midnight palaces are mocked by morning;  
sold in the sun, the gold-fretted scaffolding  
knocked boldly down when the real weather's in.  
We all will fall at just a human touch  
who weep in dreams or hide inside the stone  
that melts like a house of honey on a branch.  
Believe for me! Fold thy son!

I lean in the leaves and listen.  
The drunk bird brightens, rings at my ear,  
Icarion-feathered messenger in air,  
a handful-heaven and careless chanticleer,  
a cadence in a wilderness, a sudden station  
of looped singing, loosed while I crouch here  
wasted in fear, O! Mother of my tears!

And have no hands to serve and none to save.  
No heart to haul heavy up, letting the scarlet go  
its free way, staining the starched waves,  
flooding the statues I have worshiped so;  
no heart to knock everywhere and hurl blood  
hard against every door, then fall where I stood,  
leaving me wrecked in red but lost in love!

No, but not here, where priests and prisoners crawl,  
locked in the arms of angels on the wall.  
They whisper in their watery chains and cough.

Galled in their ropes, not fallen far enough,  
they step where the thorns are thickest, and are blown  
back in the wind; they leave a blazing town  
to find the fields in flames, and roads of bone.

Believe for me! Some mornings I will waken  
to see where the sun has been, and count his hours.  
Some days are worked with a wonder unforsaken,  
our chainless bodies scattered in the flowers,  
free for a moment from the gauze of tears,  
swung on like swallows, all our pity done:  
O! Mother of my fears! Behold thy son!

# A Love Poem

**I**N the white mansion of my hand  
lie engraved my guest;  
asleep in the tamed, bony island  
hear the heartbeat beast.

Hear the far tides fold and battle,  
child, caretaker, O counterpart!  
Your drunk king in his park startles  
the loud apple of the heart.

Rise in me, singer, when I wake  
to see the sun's rude runners  
salute, and his bold trumpets mock  
all our timid banners.

Be in me the free prisoner, caught  
but not cruel, but not captured;  
(as the light lips learn untaught  
how the face is featured).

Alert in the azure of the eyes,  
catch the stumbling blindman.  
Be, in the fumbled ship, a breeze  
and an aerial engine.

If, in a moon, I slip outside  
to mark the turned world,  
sing in my shuttered side  
and light the low peril.

Within, you can swim and sweeten  
(like springs in the April bark  
their cherry-flavored house), and fatten  
on the blushed food of the dark.

And I shall surrender summertimes;  
quilt with clover the mute desert;  
send you those intermittent wines  
that flood the fooled heart.

Rejoice in me, then, singer,  
sing in the flowered mountain!  
Bless, in his night, the fond beginner  
at his simple fountain.



# Suppose We Kill a King

**SUPPOSE** we kill a king, and then a king, and then a king;  
princes are waiting everywhere;  
suppose by poison or by water, kill a queen;  
her daughter sits upon the stair.

The beast begun comes back.  
Like shadows or like mirrors where they stand,  
the sun assassinates, the moon refurnishes  
the shadow with a hand.  
Lying alone in midnight, drowned in guilt  
and staggered with emeralds while they sleep:  
the daggers in the bed of silk,  
the devils in disguise,  
the footman with the hand that shakes,  
and when they wake,  
the Dauphin with his eyes.

The king will walk, an antlered ghost, through castle halls,  
and dukes will turn their heads to see;  
the queen will wake to find her face on palace walls  
looking down from a tapestry.

A prince, in lighting a taper for a tomb  
and putting a sleepy king to bed,  
will leave a glistening rapier in his room:  
will separate his heart and head  
and kneeling at his bleeding crown  
and covering the fallen head  
will stifle the echo with his gown.

Sidewise in Venetian glass  
the mirror shows the murderer, a king.  
The bells that rang a funeral  
must pause to ring a christening.  
The one who killed the king is killed,  
assassin, silenced with a stone;  
a prison hung around his throat,  
a weight upon his tongue.

Like mice beneath a rotting throne, the whispering men  
sit in the palace sun,  
and as the coffin passes through the towns,  
lay down their daggers to put on their crowns.



# Sonnets

## I

**A**NNOUNCED to me by trumpets and by tears,  
by tempests in the silk, by paper wars,  
how calendars of death in distant years  
will well up in our eyes and wall our stars.  
In ferns and forests, as the ghost appears  
wrapped in his flags or swinging from his shores,  
muffled with cautious cloth, we stop our ears,  
sing in our sleep to silence all his sores.

Pinned to our wrists like butterflies to glass,  
the alphabets of age, the wheels of grief.  
A grain of salt, a nail, a lip, a leaf  
reminds us that they melt and move through grass.

Announced to me by all they left to keep  
how soon they shall assassinate my sleep.

## II

Sewn to my side, the shaken ships of love  
move in their milky waste of pearls and blood;  
let down their thorny nets to fire and flood,  
splinter the roof of water, drown the dove.  
First, in the breath of morning, all put out  
in siren-light and glittering of grace,  
savored by weather; at the white lookout  
sight simple islands moored in flowered space.

Then, on my banks of flesh, as on a rock,  
heave hills and heavens signaling the wreck;  
wild on the wave, they thunder in and shock  
the red, remote cathedral where I work.

The birdlike boats, bringing their beaks toward home,  
spin in my side, sail down and rest on bone.

### III

“Such joy comes knocking at the gate of tears,”  
wears triumph while he weeps and climbs the stairs;  
looks for his kingdom, opens all the doors  
on rooms of ashes, ceilings, windows, floors;  
looks for the chiming clock and finds it gone;  
the grey walls failing, and the rugs like flesh  
woven with faded wreaths of frozen sun.  
The halls are full of animals and fish.

The children lie asleep wrapped in their blood;  
the neighbors walk along a toppling roof;  
the gardener digs a grave with arms of wood;  
the dogs stare and the birds fall from the cliff.

Such joy, come knocking at the gate of fears,  
finds the house fallen in his childhood fires.

#### IV

In battle with bold angels in the dark,  
Michael and the Lucifers we love  
must lose. It is an error of the Ark  
that animals be paired, eagle to dove.  
Balance is death. With man it is intended  
angels succumb to our humanity.  
Though battle and dark blood be never ended,  
the son should win once over vanity.

The fatal folly of our parents is  
a victory of years. This wisdom tears  
the child in his tower, the child in his  
intricate terror, innocent of wars.  
Angels must fall before the fall of man;  
the father loses first, and then the son.

## V

Returned to my town of trees, the summers start  
their love in leaf, and flower in the walls;  
into the medaled morning, April falls  
as far as the acre from heart to heart.  
In white aisles of my chest and chaliced bones  
another flower starts in deeper farms.  
Christened with light and capped with hidden thorns  
I sleep in the crypt and cradle of your arms.

Now boated back, wept on my river home,  
I see the wasp-and-violet-scattered mountain,  
once a dark pasture of obsidian  
when last I left it wrapped in rain and storm,  
ablaze in its armor of bonfire-fountains  
and final, miracle meridian.



## VI

Some mornings in cold masonry expose  
their bloom in huts of ice, fed with a fire  
that shatters what it shows, shows us a rose  
mounted immaculate in ample air.  
Coined quietly in calm, then hurried forth  
under the wheeling stars, was resurrected.  
Muffling its green machinery, this earth  
molded and seamed, cold rose on rose erected.

And underground, the weather that has hollowed  
stone from around the heart, is still dissolving  
those grey and fallen sculptures, to be followed  
thorn upon thorn and red on red revolving  
in faultless succession as the bowered ocean,  
unveiling the architecture of devotion.

## VII

The dark feeds us the dark, the leaden word;  
hangs up its leafless heaven when we've looked,  
and halting when the knock of light is heard,  
we close the eyes, let the bold dead lie locked.  
The heart sings in its stone, but when we've knocked  
falls still, held like the frightened singing bird  
hearing the hunter; stops when he has heard,  
hung on the branch of terror, mute and mocked.

As prisoners, faltering at the shock  
of light from an opened door, will step back,  
back through their hunger to familiar dark,  
lean on the bars and let the bars lean back,  
we're fooled in the fabled dark, afraid to see  
the cage will crumble if we lift the key.

## VIII

Corn-colored children of our paradise  
hang naked in the trees, ageless in ice,  
summerless shadows caged in cold surprise,  
their crowns of faded feathers dark with lice.  
Or fixed in featureless dust where they fell,  
their bleeding mothers staring from their eyes,  
they sleep like frozen dwarfs. Our victories  
halo their heads; our pity wreathes them well.

The starving pose for photographs. Their cries,  
like crazy toys, molest the infidel  
angry at agony. These fleshless dice  
brighten the fields, empty of asphodel.  
Their voiceless terror tells us like a bell  
our heavens are inhabited with hell.

## IX

Another summer sealed and still no sign  
except, in the doomed grass, the frantic beetle  
struggling against a moving pole of wind  
toward his brown sleep in the leafy steeple.  
Another sun outshone and still no word  
except the mute box hanging in the wood  
where warblers and the Persian hummingbird  
performed their aerials undisturbed.

Another winter waits and still no strength  
to live in love and walk against our tears;  
but only time moves on its stars at length,  
and on and on through years and years and years.

Another dreamer wakes and still no proof  
he lies awake and under his own roof.

## X

When love is pity then it is perverse;  
fed on a stolen fruit, will nourish none,  
but, like lost sailors, swing from worse to worse,  
whose waves no waters are, whose star's undone.  
This coronation of a crippled king  
will blacken statues and turn wax the flower;  
he cannot kiss whose mouth's devouring  
dust for bread and centuries for an hour.

This charity is cool that fools the arms  
and sets false fires in the dwindled night.  
When love is pity, all the blood's alarms  
should ring the sleeper from his dead delight.  
Then, in red morning, he may see them move,  
love and pity down each separate grove.

# Song for Jane Bowles

OUR world's lost half its light;  
it's dimming down  
steady now and dumb  
like a weathered town  
in English midnight.

As the gold rust goes  
from the garden rose,  
through the lashes of the eye  
see a leaner sky  
bereft of blues.

Childhood's capped clowns  
jungle no more.  
What we later wear  
we can't remember.  
The fool in the face frowns.

The room gets smaller,  
the door tight and low;  
and the brushed snow  
is at the window.  
March is a jailer.

We fix the dark fires  
and climb the stairs,  
and no one hears  
the loose light tears  
and no one cares.

## Soft Swimmer, Winter Swan

**T**HE sun shows thin through hail, wallpaper-pale, and  
falls  
grey from its royal world toward colder poles.  
Gone, like a grave swan gone blossoming in bone,  
a white tree of feathers, blown singly down.

A last, a light, and caught in the air-ladder lark,  
south-driven, climbing the indian, swift dark, and listen!  
Sped by the building cold and rare in ether, birds hasten  
the heart already taxed with cloud and cherubim—  
fretted heaven, strained songless and flown dim.  
Out from the house that held them in safe summer,  
small ponds and blue counties, the chequered swimmers  
in air, spring sudden through the closing vault of frost.  
(The last, awakened by a late storm, are forever lost.)

But the calm swan, adamant in autumn, passes  
through still willowed water, parting the yellow rushes.  
His eye, like a lighted nail, sees the vast  
distance of amethyst roll under him, the marble beast.

Seen from the shore, this bird but luminous boat,  
so motionless in speed, quiet, will float  
forward in cold time, disdaining harbor; marooned  
in infinite roads of rivers, his wings wrought around  
to muffle danger and battle with the wind;  
safe, slow, calm, a ship with frail lights, a white swan.

But seen from beneath, the soft statue hardens; the wild feet  
must wrest from this pure prison some retreat,

outdistance winter and oblivion; now, in feverish motion,  
foam  
the careless waters, throat, wing, heart, all spotless in arched  
bone.

Pressed, must push farther on through lakes where winter  
lies  
secret and dumb in shallows, building bright fields of ice  
to trap the transparent fish, turn the wet world to stone,  
surprise the soft swimmer and capture the winter swan.

We see, serene, this desperate passage through perfect seas;  
taught to see ease in agony, see only ease.  
In the battle of snow against snow and wind upon wind  
the dead lie fooled in the ice, too far to find.



## Song

WHO carries coin and crown  
comes from the seaside down,  
destroyer of my town.

And in the halls of wheat  
you hear his serpent feet  
like feathers in the heat.

Along my vein and bone  
his arrowhead of stone  
drives the lost blood toward home.

Who makes my heart his room  
is silent when I come  
as moss within a tomb.

His head of love, his hands of lace  
unwind my final hiding place.

## In the Snow-world

THE word leaves our lips in ice;  
warped in a glass, is meaning visible,  
speech become frost, and love with weight.  
Where we step, the inches of the world  
sink in a little, filling up the wound.  
All are in their houses, looking out.  
The birds, wrapped in a room of string,  
blink back at the light, remembering  
yesterday's noisy rain and hammering  
today turned solid, like a burial.  
In scarlet holes in hills the foxes  
find the air too tight to breathe,  
stretched thin and shared by many miles.  
They turn now in their sleep of leaves,  
and hearing death break faintly in a bugle,  
run low like a ribbon, escaping, through the trees,  
the teeth of the horse, the hunter like an eagle.  
Somewhere the deer are leaping in the weather  
surprised by the gentle ways and shapes of water.  
With no leaf left, the snow brings bread,  
a showered communion over all the trees;  
foils and fills the branches, pillowing  
the rock they lean in, crowning limbs  
with a cold halo of ice and a glistening.  
And all are afraid of the absence of sound,  
as of something missing. Tunneling underground,  
the mole stops at a frozen, black horizon;  
the bat, hung like leather from his feet,  
swings silently, his eyes closed twice  
against this mystery. And with humanity,

the road that leads into the village  
shows monuments, implies a cemetery.  
The children's snowmen with luminous black eyes  
will wistfully melt, a broom their wooden weapon  
against the flashing minute of winter sun.  
Over their porous cheeks, like ink in cotton,  
flow charcoal tears. We stand in the center  
to see the world fall down from its arch,  
caught, as our own far heaven disappears  
and everyone else's heaven is getting closer,  
covering us with memories and years.  
Like the man, the size of a thimble, stuck  
in the solid and circular glass of childhood,  
with neither a sun nor a moon; when it is shook,  
the whispering wild world of snow and light  
smothers him under for our own delight.

# Gabriel

**D**OWN all the marble miles  
and doorways of despair  
find perpetual exile  
expectant there.

This is my Gabriel  
whose spectacular, aerial  
agility is angel's wax  
to melt upon my rocks.

It is breath to this ghost  
in his heart's hills lost;  
and it is miracle's nail  
hammered to my heel.

Expectant, as if to watch;  
silent, to catch;  
like a clarion of history  
announcing an agony.

His birds sing lonely  
in a wooden town.  
His paper ceremony  
trumpets me home.

# Jumping Midnight Salmon

**T**HIS is a scene of my imagination :  
guided by wet lamps toward the choiring water,  
the silver wharf wood splinters at our heels  
and crooked ropes trip the drunk stargazer.

Those leaning, fragile, melancholy houses  
seen at the seaside loom here also,  
although this journey takes us to a river.  
I can hear the thin wives in their iron beds.

I know the damp children are dropped in sleep,  
and the sailor folded in his farm of green.  
On the porch, the red-eyed dreaming dog  
smells the lantern moving like a moon.

After some hours inland, our hearts bright with beats  
in the bold midnight that dewes the jacket,  
we come to a little shelf hung over the river,  
and our blond lamps dazzle the swinging fog.

Like Indians, first one and then another  
crouches on haunches close to the coiling water ;  
leans his drawn face down toward the rapid mirror,  
the muscular unfolding meadows.

And there, below, twined in a million armors,  
they weave and shine, arched in the pebbled dark ;  
loop their escape through all this world's windows  
in cold joy, the jumping midnight salmon !

# Hurricane Lamp

THE hushed bell of the lamp  
guards a grey light  
against the damp,  
as an immutable skeleton  
cages the heart.  
It suffers us to sight  
flaws in the fiery dark,  
to save one dwindling sun  
against all shock.  
It gives wilderness a glow  
of ready vermillion,  
poised to overthrow  
whatever leaning lion  
is wrestling in the snow.  
This light, like the slipping moon,  
surrenders slow.

Now, in a wrecking wind,  
we feast our fears  
at this cold shrine;  
find harbor in pale wealth  
and white fires.

I see myself  
printed within the glass  
and blind with a tear.  
Banked between wars  
this small safety shines.

The spiral hurricane  
rushes the stairs to the heart;

drenched with mercurial rain  
the wires spark,  
the chandelier has dropped  
through the wet roof of the dark.  
We lift a match to watch  
the luminous leaves go down  
over the raging meadow  
and the crooked town.

Inside the iron frame  
the fastened flame  
widens like a whisper taking sound  
and illuminates our ground.  
We open doors; we listen  
and hear all seasons pass  
while the gold thread in the glass  
climbs and glistens.

This knife of light releases  
our trapped breath.  
After the storm is over,  
it shows us on the lawn, beneath  
the weight of death,  
tomorrow's clover.

# Fooled in Sleep

ON waking, feel the lion light  
loom over you ; the gaunt and graceless room,  
faced squarely, wheel back bright ;  
the curtain part over the rocking heart.  
Lifting the head up from its warm cave,  
will tears swarm sudden over a lonely arm ?  
As rain wrecks silence or sparkles dark,  
so morning may be marred by memory,  
marked by remembrance as an enemy.  
Fooled in sleep, are you now surprised  
at this pitiable, pale paradise ?  
The day world wading toward you, pier by pier ?  
Where once you washed so steep in sleep  
hung with a dumb weight, frozen and caught,  
there tragedy was secure and terror pure ;  
the beasts at last roamed back into their towns  
and the remote miles of bone.  
Within that ravening sleep you heralded danger  
at least with a splitting cry ; dodged death  
in instant recognition ; gathered breath.  
So hope is restored at morning  
with a solider despair.  
You suffer pity when you wake,  
widening the stone gaze to include  
a signal solitude, a chalk and marble maze.  
Each ghost floats forward with a famished face.  
Discover yourself so deeply occupied,  
so weaponless, it empties terror even,  
exposing a faded heaven.  
As the branched sleep is broken,



the tears harden, and the tongue  
is tired, not yet having spoken.  
As the heart shrinks and the five fingers  
relax their star,  
waking brings back, not where we were,  
but where we are.

## Antiphonal Song

**W**HAT is it eats the hunter's breath  
as he picks through the thicket?  
The blood that's bound to bleed to death  
like a leak in a bucket.

What is it tires the oarsman so  
as he climbs the chaste water?  
The love that he leaves and the winds that blow  
him on green miles after.

What is it drains the drinker there  
at the jumping fountain?  
The desert he crossed that brought him there  
and the next mountain.

## The Lark-hunter

**K**ISSES her cold sleeping mouth in the dark.  
Promising victory, straps on his belt of bullets,  
his knives and nets, the boots, the jacket,  
all of the apparatus of fear,  
and leaves her dreaming.  
He studies the light muffled in the curtains  
as he drinks his coffee.  
He washes his hands.  
His heart building, walks out through  
the full meadow toward the trees.

All objects come awake like angels  
around him. In a desert of fog and dawn  
a delicate world assembles.  
He lays nets for the thronging larks,  
plants his poisons, prepares the grave throne.

Wet-winged still and dazed in dew  
they shake forth slightly, singly,  
then in high crowds in an aerial uproar,  
a beginning of banners, a contagious flutter  
like the catching of small flames.  
Now their innocence is their danger.

These larks in the surprise of sunrise  
start adoration. The flight of the heart  
in the throat, the light, the note,  
explain to us generous grace,  
the futility of envy. In madrigal chorus  
they offer us their constant crowns.

They sing in the flawless grottoes of ether.  
Driving the night's last nightingales apart,  
propose antique elegies; sing surrender  
to being and beaded morning.

The hushed hunter watches in the bush;  
dismisses the bold bluejays,  
charmed in the midst of danger  
like lucky horses in a carnival.  
They fly on free to join the vesper sparrows,  
safe as the bells, inedible angelus  
whose tongues are too rough velvet for his taste.

Dismisses, too, the goldfinches,  
rocketing birds with bad flesh;  
all safe in their domes,  
lights that will not be eaten tonight,  
may riot in rich weather.

Reprieved also, martins and cardinals,  
various day birds, wrens and orioles,  
the hermit thrush among his violets,  
too thin or wild or common for his touch.  
These may be wary only of thunder,  
snakes, lice, stones, and boys.

But the first-found lark is marked,  
caught for a Lorelei, trained to betray.  
The hunter blinds the lark.  
Tied to a tree with a string, to sing  
undistracted in midnight that was morning,  
he hunts for the hunter like a magic toy.  
Dim in delirium, the charmed captive sings.

All the larks listen from far boughs  
to the sudden flood, the blind solo.  
From memorized leaves they are summoned down.  
Disarmed by love from their gold games,  
they surround like curious, listening seraphim;  
join him in the fire, and the trap springs.

Now they fumble in the net, lit by terror,  
caught in a clock like silk; their agate eyes,  
their agonies, a proof, a gift, a bracelet to the victor.

If it has been a good morning,  
the sun solid and early to dazzle,  
the hunter may carry home tumbled dozens  
of singers in his leather coffin.  
And, sometimes among them, an accident  
of abundance, a savorless intruder  
like the pale prince of a distant county,  
foreign as a lion at a feast of ants,  
a bitter swallow or nameless feather.

The hunter is chilled from waiting,  
posturing in shadow like a statue,  
patient until the wild mistakes of love  
crowd his bright net.  
Tall, tense, armed against the air,  
now his heart beats softer in its sea.  
The proud assassin limps home with his prize,  
swings home with his supper to his kisses,  
a branch of cold larks on his stained shoulder,  
a wife waiting to wash out the murder.

## The Queen's Face on the Summery Coin

**T**HE queen's face on the summery coin  
was never goldier nor more regal  
than his body's bright and bursting bugle  
where once it walked between the stripes of rain.

The birds swing in their appled cages  
and the solid sun will walk  
through straw houses where honey rages  
churning the light to chalk.

The wind shines on the woody grove.  
We live in a copper clock where, on the hour,  
a polished bell divides the stem and flower  
and drains the ghost-built body of its love.

Like the deaf listening for a silence  
that follows no sound,  
or the sick swung in the balance  
between wound and wound,

there is too much eye to see  
all but the nearest disorder.  
In the sable shadow of this harbor  
he lies him down among the singing bees.

## On Martha Graham's *Deaths and Entrances*

BECAUSE I have no death to breathe backward into,  
so little life to lie lovingly on,  
less and less savior to kneel and balance to,  
none to bless, none to crucify, no, not one;

though I have left all gates and windows open  
to rain and strangers in the fire-faced storms,  
only the lost, the mad, the murdered enter  
weak with weeping and crowned with indelible thorns.

How narrow the figures, moved on a chequered mile;  
hooded bishops and kings with painted eyes .  
who mock at the mirror of rage, stand speechless while  
the body betrays its old agonies.

Because the desperate mind demands witness,  
and all the guilty seek conspirator,  
I must confess, with none to strike or kiss,  
myself the invisible tormentor.

# Mariner

**T**HIS fever shall melt rocks,  
shall rot the heart;  
this fire leap in the clocks,  
wring them to wax.  
Shall sting at the start,  
stifle and depart.

This fever will unfasten  
the sun from the word;  
drain peace, and fashion  
pride in the place of passion;  
crumble the loud bird.  
Sing, swallow, sing unheard.

This fever films the eyes;  
in its seas, drowns twice  
the word-wild mariner  
pinned to his ship of ice.  
The sea-staggered stranger  
is blistered with danger.

Temptation, safe at first,  
will riot under thirst;  
his face in the clear cobalt  
shine back without a fault,  
surrendering to the worst,  
feast on the fatal salt.

Now thin with terror, float  
over the rocking rim.



Gulls in the azure swim,  
fall on the bones in the boat,  
the bubble of blood in the throat.

Do not go after him.

# A Beginning

## I

**F**ROM the lusterless prison where we pray,  
the inside house veiled in vermillion,  
look out to the morning-shaken season,  
the window, the winter, the abundant day.

Follow these arrows through a wilderness  
while the birds and suns are dropping down,  
and the papery world dissolves its illness;  
all trumpets are playing in all towns.

One, through the green glass of his eye,  
sees in his voyage chariots and ashes  
wrapped in the multiple flesh of mystery;  
the ransom of his sleep, and fabled faces.

Sees the doom in the dark, the instant unraveling,  
the sun roping the berries and the branches;  
sees the clock stop and the panther springing,  
the serpent on the gilt and glittering fences;

the morning-beaded tree, the widening spring,  
filled like a bubble balanced on a rock.  
This is his topless tower. The room is glistening,  
is starred and teared and trembles at a look.

Now, in his morning-house, his bed, his jail,  
his room, the wave, wherever he is lying,  
he looks far out and fails, he falls and fails.  
And, inward, looks on calmly at the dying.

So the creator in the middle of creation  
is desperate, like a witness to the elated  
luminous angel exploring a secret nation.  
He is amazed and dazzled, he is created.

## II

(The triumph of the prison and the priest  
is terror and contrition, is the feast  
of father and son devouring one host  
by the rich hands of God severely blessed.)

Struck on the wrist by an ancestral satan,  
he sees himself the son of this sad sultan.  
He lifts his face to the glass wherein each feature  
doubles his guilt against his ghostly Father.

Trapped by this phantom in a faded room,  
half a cathedral, half the walls of home,  
he hears the last clock striking in the hall,  
he hears his shadow falling and he sees his fall.

Those who came before him follow after,  
stuck in his side, the hungry weeping clowns,  
the deathless families, the breathless daughters,  
each ancestor armed only with a stone.

And chariots roll over him like clouds.  
Into the face of fired and flying weather  
he rushes with the winds around him loud.  
He is no longer yours, nor you his Father.

From the white hilltop, from the heavy heaven  
hanging about your shoulders like a sword,

out from your shaking house he will be driven  
without a wish, a warning, or a word.

If, in the purple act, the lion-warrior  
drops, doubled on his dagger to the hilt,  
his doom his own, shadowed with no savior,  
forgotten in black gardens of his guilt,

if, in the wraith of dust, he falls too far,  
you may condemn him from a humming star.

### III

I am that he,  
that him controlled by fathers  
and whose fate  
is finished in those fiery waters.

I am that one  
so longing for excess,  
from the unborn  
comes forward to amaze

I am that one  
whose least and lightest breath,  
shrunk to my solitude,  
is patched and plumed with death.

He is to me  
drawn tight as the root of a shadow,  
by the marginal sea  
or the mild milkweeded meadow.

I am that one  
deceived in charmed and radiant rain;  
again, in charioted sun,  
am the son enchained.

I am that one  
nailed lonely to the loud landscape  
he knew at first;  
inward only, and without escape.

#### IV

Before the sun's begun, it's gone!  
The birds, the apples in that dawn  
lie red, fly bannered in that blood,  
a hushed, illuminated flood.

Where waters run, bend down,  
dive deep and draw to harbor the unknown.  
At the first, clockless minute in the east  
be warm and walking in it once at least  
before the counterfeiting sun has crossed  
the melting angel hidden in the beast.  
Be singular and early here. Be mercy's host.

By noon the trees are dumb, the plume of thunder  
plunges in the wood and through the water;  
the salmon strike at the dark turned under,  
the metal, million, anonymous welter.

See, through the sand, a star where mornings are,  
through the hand, a rose dissolve.

Ashes are quieted by a tear,  
and the winds in the worlds revolve.

Is it within one day, by the trick of a cloud,  
that the shadow of sun is turned toward us,  
the double disaster revealed, and the cured  
fallen back on his dark bed, breathless?

So death delivers none but marks many.  
Stigmata, token, coin of conscience  
consume us at the pinnacle; money  
falls from our hanging hands like penitence.

We kneel where we sometime stood; we pray  
against all of the glittering devils, or lie alone  
in loss of love, dazzled by ghosts of a day,  
the mutiny of a minute turned and gone.

Bewildered by a bloodless death  
or agonized by lack of breath  
and frightened by the portent of a wreath,  
we burst the cage of glass to find the bride,  
destroy the tree to see the bird inside.

Let sorrow a little earlier deliver  
each from his own security and fever,  
from his belief in angels without sin.  
When we are done with glory we begin.

V

I am that one who grieves  
in winter the wide wind,

the architect of water and of leaves,  
the sculptor of a house of cloud or bone,  
investigator, shaping the sharp stone.

Today the trees are flown in frozen rooms,  
wired to the floors of snow.  
Washed clear of ornament, they show  
winter's spare statuary without a spark.  
We walk here on the ridges of the heart;  
on stones wrapped in the ice wrapped in the park  
wrapped in the wet rectangle of the dark.

The center of the ice is green, pretending spring.  
By listening at the fissure in the pond  
I can hear the rippled breath expiring,  
and recognize the end.

Marooned inside the winter lake,  
inside the carbon castles of the fish,  
arrested by the frozen weight,  
I lie in the solid world that earlier flowed,  
flowed onward toward a disappearing home,  
without a sea to fly to, but in a circle moving,  
with stations of green rest and moving slow.

I, like the fish, who found their last delight  
stopped in this congealing of the light,  
this burial in a star.  
Awake and pink and petrified  
they sit in the salt and stare  
while the white horizon falters  
and the direction is anywhere.

## VI

Captured in these northern mountains  
flawed with the greening sticks of spring,  
I hear in the ice far, fiery fountains,  
the free, muted fountains beginning.

Then stairs and hills of ice dissolve,  
prisons fall open at a whisper,  
the winds in the turned worlds revolve,  
the grey jails of the fish surrender.

I ride with them down the rough shallows,  
endlessly on as streaming swallows  
entering, unerring, everywhere  
the new, blue levels of the air.

My father's statues lie in pools of wax;  
the dark devoured, the rocks unlocked.  
The bird, the unbridled horse, plunge in the light.  
The wells break open and the world is fountaining,  
with slivering sound and nightingale-noise night,  
a breathless start, a heart, and a beginning.



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